

Accountability and Autonomy Work Group Report to Structure and Governance Committee July 28, 2014

Members:

Bob Lokken, Chair, CEO, White Cloud Analytics and Idaho Business for Education;
Reed DeMordaunt, House of Representatives, District 14; House Education Chair;
Donna Pence, House of Representatives, District 26, House Education Committee;
Gaylen Smyer, Superintendent, Cassia School District;
Anne Ritter, Idaho School Boards Association;
George Harad, Idaho Parents and Teachers Together;
Valerie Aker, Teacher, South Middle School, Nampa

Committee Charge: to further refine the following recommendations of the Governor's Task Force:

- #5 Revamp the State's Accountability Structure Involving Schools**
- #6 Empower Autonomy by Removing Constraints**
- #7 Annual Strategic Planning, Assessment and Continuous Focus on Improvement**

#5 Revamp the State's Accountability Structure Involving Schools
#7 Annual Strategic Planning, Assessment and Continuous Focus on Improvement

The 2013 Task Force recommended the state revamp the accountability structure involving schools and replaced the current compliance mandates with a system that is based on accountability for student outcomes. Central to the structure would be an annual continuous improvement cycle and strategic plan founded on improvements in student outcomes and key focus areas for the district.

Experts Consulted:

Dr. Peter Sanchioni, Superintendent of Schools, Natick Public School District, Massachusetts; Bellwether Partners, "Accountability Practices in Massachusetts and Louisiana;" Dr. T.J. Bliss, Director of Assessment and Accountability, State Department of Education (SDE); Idaho State Department of Education, "Overview of the Idaho Five-Star Rating System;" Angela Hemingway, Assessment and Accountability Coordinator, SDE; Greg Alexander, Director, Statewide System of Support, SDE; Don Coberly, Superintendent, Boise School District; Alan Dunn, Superintendent, Sugar-Salem School District

Objectives and Components:

The objective of the accountability system and district annual planning should be to support the State's goal to have 60% or more of its students prepared for career or college.

To achieve this goal, the accountability and annual planning system must have two major components:

1. The first component is designed to provide state intervention and assistance for struggling or failing schools.
2. The second component is designed to create dynamics that will propel good schools to become great schools, and great schools to continually advance. The design of the second component differs from the first, in that it is founded on continuous improvement and relies on local control and transparency to establish accountability to the local community.

Proposed Recommendations:

1. We recommend that the 5-Star Ranking System be revised and refined to facilitate accurate and fair measurement and ranking of schools and districts that require intervention and assistance.

- This system allows schools and districts to be sorted into categories that are either "superior", "adequate" or "failing". Failing schools should receive additional assistance from the State Department of Education in the form of expert assistance and additional resources. Failing schools that refuse additional assistance or do not "turn around" within a period of time would trigger more forceful intervention on the part of the State.
- Revisions to the existing 5-star system should include:
 - Adjusting the balance between student growth, school achievement, and other relevant measures. As the system is currently designed, too much weight is placed on growth and other relevant measures, often in response to federal regulation. The work team already in place to review the 5-star system should receive and consider this feedback.
- The State's intervention and assistance program for failing schools should:
 - Initially focus on resource and technical support and encouragement. Only if the school in question continues to fail and/or the district refuses outside assistance or demonstrates repeatedly that local leadership is unable to turn the school around, should the State intervention become more forceful.
 - If necessary, the ultimate intervention should include replacing local leadership (principal/superintendent) that has demonstrated, for whatever reason, that they are unable to turn around a failing school. Without this level of intervention, the state would be failing its constitutional and fiduciary responsibility, and the cost of this failure would be born directly by the students in that school and indirectly by the community and state when those students are not prepared for career and/or college. (For further notes on the issue of to whom the local superintendent is accountable, see the last section of this document.)
- If federal regulations allow, alternative schools should be removed from this part of the accountability system. An alternative ranking system should be explored that is clear, and more specifically tailored to alternative **schools**.

2. We recommend that the State implement an Annual Planning Cycle and Continuous Process Improvement Plans that Lead to Achievement Scores that Align to the 60% Goal.

"Turn every good school into a great school"

1. Update the State's strategic planning law to focus on continuous annual improvement;
2. Each school district, led by its board and superintendent, should be required to prepare annually a performance improvement plan, setting clear, measureable goals to improve achievement in the coming school year.
3. **We recommend the state offer professional development and collaborative training and support for local boards/leadership to develop awareness of and competencies in continuous improvement practices.**
4. **We recommend that the timing of data be reviewed and adjusted to align with budget and annual planning deadlines for both school boards and teachers. The timeliness of the State's report information is critical to the districts' annual planning process. Today, data are delivered too late for analysis and planning work while teachers are still on contract.**

#6 Empower Autonomy by Removing Constraints

The committee discussed areas of K-12 policy that impose a high burden on school districts with a low return of value. Based on input from superintendents across the state and a review of existing laws and administrative rules, the committee recommends the following to improve autonomy for local school districts.

- 1: We recommend that the legislature research and consider the potential impact of proposed new laws on the education system. We urge lawmakers to fully research short and long-term financial and personnel implications not just to the state general fund but also to individual schools and districts as well as state education agencies. We further recommend that the legislature conduct a cost/benefit analysis of new laws before adoption to assess effectiveness and determine unintended consequences.

Many times, new legislation imposes requirements on the system that are burdensome and costly and do not lead to efficiency or improved student outcomes. New laws and regulatory requirements should be minimized. Review of new laws could be achieved through sunsets on new legislation.

- 2: We recommend that the legislature limit the number of funding streams to school districts and prescriptive requirements for disbursement whenever possible to allow districts flexibility to use funds as needed based on local needs.

While it is the Legislature's role to set the K-12 budget, the districts would benefit from having more flexibility in the allocation of funds within the district. With the work to revamp how the state compensates teachers, there should be a need for no more than two funding "buckets" – one for compensation and one for operational expenses. Directives governing the use of operational funds should be kept to a minimum so that local district boards and administrators can best address the needs of their schools year to year.

3. We recommend that the State Board of Education include a regular review of new and existing statute and rules to assess relevance and efficacy as part of the duties of the Board's Accountability Oversight Program Manager and that a regular review of laws and rules is included in Board process.

Reviewing statute and rule to assess relevance and efficacy and to find areas for consolidation and streamlining should not be a one-and-done exercise. The Board should implement a continuous improvement process with respect to education laws and rules. We recommend that the Accountability Oversight committee solicit and review input from K-12 stakeholders, ensuring school and district administrators are involved, who can provide feedback and recommendations on how to reduce or eliminate requirements that inhibit efficiency and focus on students.

4. We recommend that whenever possible, Administrative Rule be used to specify requirements for Idaho's K-12 education system rather than placing those requirements in Idaho code through legislation.

Administrative Rule is more flexible than statute and has a more formal public comment period. Rules do require legislative affirmation so are subject to legislative review.

5. We support the work of the Innovation and Collaboration subcommittee to identify ways that the burden of data reporting to the State Department of Education's ISEE system can be mitigated.

Much of the feedback from school administrators regarding burdensome regulation and reporting requirements involved the required reporting to the state's ISEE system. There is a disproportionate amount of time being spent on reporting, and smaller districts face a larger burden based on resource availability to support the data entry and reporting.

DISCUSSION:

Definitions of Key Terms

1. **"Achievement"** means academic performance relative to a standard. For example, one measure of achievement could be the percentage of students who score 500 or greater on Standardized Achievement Tests, such as SAT
2. **"Improvement"** measures the change (positive or negative) from year to year in the percentage of students in a particular school or district who met the achievement standard. For example, if 70% of students at a particular high school achieved 500 or greater on the SATs in year one, and 77% achieved or exceeded that level the following year, that would be a 10% year-to-year improvement.
3. **"Relevant Indicators"** includes such factors as the number of Advanced Placement tests taken and passed, the number of students successfully participating in dual credit programs, and similar indicators of advanced academic achievement.
4. **"Growth"** measures the improvement in the performance of an individual student from the beginning to the end of a given school year (or specified number of years), relative to the student's initial status and growth of his or her relevant cohort.
5. **"60%" or "60% Goal"** refers to the state's goal to have 60% or more of its citizens entering the workforce with some form of post-secondary diploma or certificate (1, 2, 4, or more) by 2020. The supporting SBE goal is that Idahoans age 25-34 will have achieved the 60% goal. For the purposes of the taskforce work on the K-12 system, we focused on how the K-12 system prepares its students to achieve that goal.

Please note: the terms "*improvement*" and "*growth*" should not be used interchangeably. "*Improvement*" is measured at a school or district level, and relates to the change in levels of "*achievement*." "*Growth*" is measured at the individual student level, and may or may not result in aggregate "*improvement*" depending on the starting and ending points for the measurements and the mix of students being measured.

Recommendations for the Statewide Accountability System and Annual Planning Process

The objective of the accountability system and district annual planning should be to support the State's goal to have 60% or more of its students prepared for career or college, as indicated by matriculation in post-secondary education. To achieve this goal, the accountability and annual planning system must have two major components. The first component is designed to provide state intervention and assistance for struggling or failing schools. The second component is designed to create dynamics that will propel good schools to become great schools, and great schools to continually advance. The design of the second component differs from the first, in that it is founded on continuous improvement and relies on local control and transparency to establish accountability to the local community.

The specific recommendations of this sub-committee are that the State should:

1. **Revise and refine the 5-Star Ranking System to facilitate accurate and fair measurement and ranking of schools and districts that require intervention and assistance.**

This system allows schools and districts to be sorted into categories that are either "superior", "adequate" or "failing". Failing schools should receive additional assistance from the State Department of Education in the form of expert assistance and additional resources. Failing schools that refuse additional assistance or do not "turn around" within a period of time would trigger more forceful intervention on the part of the State. The measurements for this sorting system at the high school level should include achievement, improvement and relevant indicators that support achievement and improvement. For the middle school and elementary school level, the measurements should also include an indicator of individual student growth.

Revisions to the existing 5-star system should include:

1. Adjusting the balance between student growth, school achievement, and other relevant measures. As the system is currently designed, too much weight is placed on growth and other relevant measures, often in response to federal regulation. The work team already in place to review the 5-star system should receive and consider this feedback.
 1. Placing greater weighting at all levels on achievement and improvement, such that there would be a strong correlation between the weighted star rating and the levels of academic achievement and improvement;
 2. Including a component of "growth" only at the elementary and middle school levels;
 3. Simplifying the calculation of the weighted score so that it is more transparent and understandable;
 4. Publishing the rankings and underlying calculations in an open and timely fashion, so that the results are available to all interested parties.
2. The State's intervention and assistance program for failing schools should:

Initially focus on resource and technical support and encouragement. Only if the school in question continues to fail and/or the district refuses outside assistance or demonstrates repeatedly that local leadership is unable to turn the school around, should the State intervention become more forceful.

If necessary, the ultimate intervention should include replacing local leadership (principal/superintendent) that has demonstrated, for whatever reason, that they are unable to turn around a failing school. Without this level of intervention, the state would be failing its constitutional and fiduciary responsibility, and the cost of this failure would be born directly by the students in that school and indirectly by the community and state when those students are not prepared for career and/or college. (For further notes on the issue of to whom the local superintendent is accountable, see the last section of this document.)

3. If federal regulations allow, alternative schools should be removed from this part of the accountability system. An alternative ranking system should be explored that is clear, and more specifically tailored to alternative schools.

5. Implement an Annual Planning Cycle and Continuous Process Improvement Plans that Lead to Achievement Scores that Align to the 60% Goal.

The second component of the statewide accountability system is focused on turning good schools into great schools through continuous improvement. This component is intended to make continuous improvement a requirement for every school in Idaho. The foundational element of this is annual improvement planning and goal setting. Goals and accountability for achievement of the goals are set and maintained at a local level. Accountability for the school's performance and its ability to achieve its annual goals is enforced via clear, understandable, transparent measures published within the community, and reviewed by the State Board of Education.

1. This sub-committee recommends that the state strategic planning law be updated to clarify the State's intent to require and support an annual planning process in each school district that is focused on continuous process improvement and progress in achievement. Unfortunately, the current legislation requires each district to have an "annual strategic plan" in place. That requirement has been interpreted in the context of classic organizational strategic planning that is rooted in mission and vision statements and a 3-5 year planning horizon, while the original intent of the Governor's Taskforce was that each school and district have an annual improvement plan with clear, measurable goals. These plans were to be the foundation of local control and accountability to the local community and an alignment mechanism to the State's overall strategic goal of 60%. Amending or replacing the existing legislation is necessary to reflect the original intent.
2. Each school district, led by its board and superintendent, should be required to prepare annually a performance improvement plan, setting clear, measurable goals to improve achievement in the coming school year. The plan would identify a focused set of targets for improvement, selected from a collection of relevant measures provided by the State Board of Education including the Career and College Readiness or High School Readiness score for the school/district (for more on "CCR Score" and "HSR Score" -- see below), and the focus areas and measurable improvement targets selected for improvement. The intent is that all plans lead toward the achievement of the career and college readiness goal for the state. The goals for each school and district should be summarized into a simple one-to-three page plan headlined by the CCR Score (or HSR Score) and the targeted CCR Score (or HSR Score). The plan should then be published and widely shared within the district and the community, as well as submitted to the State Board of Education.
3. Each school in the state should be scored on two metrics. The first is a measure of the "Readiness" of the students graduating from that school. The second is a measure of the "Improvement" in that school's readiness over the prior year. For high schools, this score would be the "Career and College Readiness Score" of the students exiting that school. For an elementary school, it would be a "High School Readiness Score." The second measure should be the "Improvement score" for that school, and it should measure the percentage of

improvement made, positive or negative, from the prior year in the readiness score.

1. The Career and College Readiness Score (CCR Score) should be measured as the percentage of students leaving that high school who are deemed academically ready to move to the next level. For high schools, this would be a measure of how many high school students from that school are ready for career or college work, directly in alignment with the state's 60% goal. For example, today that might be the percentage of graduating students that score 500 or more on all sections of the SAT.
2. If the school is an elementary, middle school, junior high, etc. that does not continue through 12th grade, then the measure would be the percentage of students completing the highest grade within that school who are academically testing at or above the level that is deemed to prepare that student for success at the next level. For a school that sequentially precedes high school, this (for example) would be called the High School Readiness Score (HSR Score) and might measure proficiency rates of the highest grade (8th or 9th) as measured by the SBAC or an equivalent test. If an elementary school's highest grade is 6th grade, their score would be a 7th Grade Readiness Score... etc.
3. The Career and College Readiness Improvement (CCR Improvement) or High School Readiness Improvement (HSR Improvement) should be measured as a percentage change in the CCR Score or HSR Score measured year-over-year. For example, if a school in 2014 had a CCR Score of 56%, and the same school had a CCR Score of 51% for 2013, then the CCR Improvement for that school in 2014 would be +9.8% $((56\%/51\%) - 100\%)$.
4. The state will provide to each district its official CCR Score and CCR Improvement scores (or HSR Score and CHS Improvement as is relevant) at the end of each academic year. These State reports should include statewide and cohort comparisons. Specifically, best-in-class schools for the relevant metric should be identified along with that school's score in that area. Cohorts of like kind schools should include schools of similar size, funding, and circumstances (e.g. student body, Title 1 and ELL rates).
The State reports would allow local leaders and communities to see how their schools were performing relative to peers and to the state as a whole. This context is critical to local accountability and to planning and target setting. The State report would also provide some level of actionable information that could spur collaboration across districts. Best-in-class districts could be contacted for further detail on their efforts and sharing of best practices.
6. The timeliness of the State's report information is critical to the districts' annual planning process. Today, data are delivered too late for analysis and planning work while teachers are still on contract. This timing issue needs to be addressed.

7. We recommend the state offer professional development and collaborative training and support for local boards/leadership to develop awareness of and competencies in continuous improvement practices.

Attached you will find examples of potential CCR scoring and annual planning documents.

Guiding Principles for the Statewide K-12 Accountability System (K12-AS)

1. The goal of the K12-AS is to help the State achieve its overall goal of >60% of young adults entering the workforce having completed some form of post-secondary (PS) degree/certification. The role of the K-12 system in this goal is to prepare students for success at the post-secondary level, in alignment with the state's 60% goal (see Key Terms above).
2. The K12-AS must serve two related but different purposes. First, it must have an "intervention" system for under-performing schools designed to move the entire system to acceptable levels of performance. Second, the accountability system should serve as a catalyst for "good schools" to become "great schools." In Idaho, we don't want merely good schools. We want all Idaho schools to be great schools. The two elements of the system have very different methods by which they would accomplish their respective purposes. It would be a mistake to try to serve both purposes via the same mechanisms.
3. Key elements of the "intervention" system:
 - a. The intervention system must have clearly defined measures and triggers used to identify a school that is *underperforming* and therefore in need of intervention.
 - b. There should be identified levels within the intervention system. These levels should indicate the degree of underperformance and chronic nature of the situation. These clearly defined levels would in turn drive the type and degree of intervention(s) required.
 - c. The intervention system must not simply produce a "judgment". The system should offer tools and assistance to help struggling schools improve performance.
 - d. The system should apply to a school, not a district, although the district superintendent would be the "point person" in terms of accountability. The state should not undermine local leadership by meddling in local operational matters. It is the superintendent's and local board's responsibility to hold local building leadership and personnel accountable. The local board is accountable to local voters. The superintendent is primarily accountable to the local board, and secondarily accountable, as the district's senior leader, to the State. For further discussion on this matter, see the side notes at the end of this document.
 - e. The State, in cooperation with the local school board, would be the primary agent of enforcement at this level of accountability.
 - f. This part of the accountability system would necessarily require force – we cannot allow struggling systems to fail continually.
4. Key elements of the "Good-to-Great" system:
 - a. The goal of this system element is not episodic intervention, but rather continuous improvement, innovation and collaboration. With this in mind, specific annual improvements should be determined and driven locally.
 - b. The good-to-great system should have an annual cadence and rhythm with ongoing small improvements, continually refined and compounded over time. This is how schools become great, and stay great.
 - c. The good-to-great system requires a finer-grain measurement system than the 5 Star System. This measurement should allow for annual progress that can be measured,

- evaluated, and celebrated. Coarse-grained measures such as the 5-Star System and underperformance triggers are not useful in continuous improvement efforts.
- d. Unlike the intervention system, the good-to-great system should be owned and driven by the local school boards and administration. The role of the state would be to support these local efforts with clear, concise, uniform, and transparent measures, which would serve as the foundation of the improvement system. (Outcomes would measure improvement, and should not be confused with activities and activity measures.)
 - e. Public transparency and the local school boards would provide accountability in this system.
5. The foundation of the K12-AS is clear, concise, uniform, and transparent measurement of student achievement. Measures that are overly complex or indirect in terms of whether they accurately measure student learning should be avoided. The measures should lead directly to the identification of opportunities for improvement. People need to understand and have clarity on what is needed; this is eroded with complex or questionable metrics.
 6. The focal point of the state's K12-AS must be local leadership, specifically the local Superintendent. The state should not disenfranchise the local community by reaching around the Superintendent. Nor should the state hold the "district" or "school" accountable. Whether used to identify schools where intervention is required or support continuous improvement to make good schools great, the accountability system should focus on leadership.

Guiding Principles for the Annual Planning Process

1. The greatest value of annual planning is not in the plan itself, but in the process of developing the plan: establishing performance measurements, providing clear and transparent data, gaining the alignment of key stakeholders, understanding outcomes in the context of current performance relative to best practices and lastly and most importantly, setting priorities to focus on a critical few areas for annual improvement. The actual plan itself should be very brief, likely 1-3 pages. This is because the plan is not the result of surveying the entire continuum, which happens in the early stages of planning. The plan is the result of identifying key focus areas for the coming year. Without this annual planning and improvement effort, it is highly unlikely a district will achieve the 60% goal of preparing its students for successful post-secondary education or career pursuits.
2. Key attributes of proper execution of the annual planning process:
 - a. Data transparency and clarity about the measurements that matter most. The process should be framed by the improvement of one or more of a defined set of metrics. This forces leadership at all levels to gain clarity and alignment across the state on what is most important for our schools, to understand how each school is performing against these focus areas, and to set clear targets for improvement for each local school. Each school is unique. The local board and leadership should have the autonomy to set specific targets and focal points for improvement as they see fit, as long as the overall school and district are in alignment with the states higher goal of the 60% prepared for career and college.
 - b. Local ownership – state alignment. The annual planning process should be executed within a framework that is provided by the State Board. This allows the state to fulfill its fiduciary responsibility and constitutional mandate. However, the actual plan, focus areas and goals

are completely at the discretion of the local school boards and leadership. Each local district and school is free to select and adjust their local initiatives and goals to fit local circumstances.

- c. Clear alignment and focus between the state, the local school board, and the local administration, each year, on achieving the 60% goal.
- d. Accountability for performance and improvement progress rest with the local community. By providing clear and consistent measurement, along with the autonomy to adjust to local circumstances, the annual planning process should provide the transparency needed to govern local schools. Achievement against these locally defined improvement goals should become the core basis of local leadership evaluations.

Final Notes

1. Under the State Constitution, the state has a clear role in the K-12 system. The constitution designates constitutional offices and grants them authority (the State Super and the State Board) to govern the school system.
2. Local school boards are accountable to the local electorate. There is no line of accountability from a local board to the State, other than areas covered by law, and laws are about compliance not performance.
 - a. So there must be accountability to the state... somewhere. If it is not the Local Board... then the only other option is the local Superintendent.
 - b. In law, today, the State grants a license to a Superintendent... without which the Superintendent cannot practice in this state. If the State has authority to grant a license, it logically follows that the state can withhold that license.
 - c. In law, today, the State has the authority to take over a failing school ... this is in the existing statute. Once the state takes over a district, then the Superintendent would be accountable to the State.
3. Just because the superintendent is primarily and normally accountable to the local board, it is in no way inconsistent that they are also, in certain matters, accountable to the State. This idea does not represent a new idea or precedent.

In relation to GROWTH METRICS:

1. Growth metrics that measure the longitudinal growth of students over a school year are somewhat controversial at this point in time. Research shows that unless there are strong and consistent standards across the overall system, growth metrics should not be used for formal accountability at the State level.
2. An argument can be made that growth metrics are best used as a part of teacher feedback and for tactical/operational improvements in the classroom. The State's role in accountability is at the school and district level. And the State's role is oversight for

achievement levels, not operational practices. Thus it can be argued that growth is not a measure the state should be using for the district accountability system.

3. The State's goal is clearly stated as the 60% benchmark. Growth, while related, is not directly a measurement of that 60%. Thus introducing this into the State's accountability system brings complexity.
4. For this reasons above, it does not make sense to include growth metrics into the State's accountability system.